DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 176 SO 028 401

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TITLE	Global Trends in Civic Education for Democracy. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-SO-97-1
PUB DATE	Jan 97
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002014
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47408.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship Education; *Civics; Communism; *Democracy; Democratic Values; *Educational Change; Educational Development; *Educational Trends; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Political Science; Theory Practice Relationship; World Affairs
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

During the 1990s, there has been an unprecedented global dissemination of information about the theory and practice of democracy and civic education for democracy. This digest identifies nine trends having broad potential for influencing civic education in the constitutional democracies of the world: (1) conceptualization of civic education in terms of three interrelated components (civic knowledge, skills, and virtues); (2) systematic teaching of core concepts; (3) analysis of case studies; (4) development of decision-making skills; (5) comparative and international analysis of government and citizenship; (6) development of participatory skills and civic virtues through cooperative learning activities; (7) use of literature to teach civic virtues; (8) active learning of civic knowledge, skills, and virtues; (9) conjoining of content and process in teaching and learning of civic knowledge, skills, and virtues. (CB)

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ED 410 176

GLOBAL TRENDS IN CIVIC EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

ERIC DIGEST
EDO-SO-97-1

BY JOHN J. PATRICK

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES/SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

JANUARY 1997

SO 028 401

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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ERIC Digest EDO-SO-97-1

January 1997

Global Trends in Civic Education for Democracy

by John J. Patrick

Since the 1980s, there has been a global resurgence of democracy. In various regions of the world, people of different countries and cultures emphatically have approved of democratic principles and practices. And they have recognized that effective civic education is an indispensable means to the establishment and maintenance of democratic ideals and institutions.

During the 1990s, there has been an unprecedented global dissemination of information about the theory and practice of democracy and civic education for democracy. Nine trends have broad potential for influencing civic education in the constitutional democracies of the world.

Trend 1: Conceptualization of Civic Education in Terms of Three Interrelated Components. Educators throughout the world are recognizing that civic education is teaching and learning the principles and practices of democratic governance and citizenship. Its interrelated components are civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic virtues.

Civic knowledge consists of fundamental ideas and information that learners must know and use to become effective and responsible citizens of a democracy. In general, civic knowledge includes principles of democratic theory, operations of democratic governance, and behaviors of democratic citizenship. In particular, it involves concepts and data about democracy in the learner's country and comparisons with other countries.

Civic skills are the cognitive operations that enable the learner to understand, explain, compare, and evaluate principles and practices of government and citizenship. There also are participatory skills that involve actions by citizens to monitor and influence public policies and the resolution of public issues. Together, the cognitive and participatory skills involve the citizen's use of knowledge to think and act competently in response to the ongoing challenges of democratic governance and citizenship.

Civic virtues, the third essential component of civic education, are the traits of character necessary for the preservation and improvement of democratic governance and citizenship. Examples of civic virtues are respect for the worth and dignity of each person, civility, integrity, self-discipline, tolerance, compassion, and patriotism.

Trend 2: Systematic Teaching of Core Concepts. Civic educators are systematically teaching concepts about democratic governance and citizenship. They are emphasizing the criteria by which one identifies instances or non-instances of fundamental concepts, such as constitutionalism, representative democracy, and individual rights. And they are teaching students to use the criteria to organize and interpret information about political institutions and behavior.

Trend 3: Analysis of Case Studies. Teachers are requiring students to apply core concepts or principles to the analysis of case studies. Thus, students may demonstrate that they understand a concept by using it correctly to organize and interpret information in a case about the political behavior of individuals and groups. Case studies may also be about legal disputes decided by judges or juries in a court of law. The use of case studies brings the drama and vitality of authentic civic life into the classroom and demands the practical application of academic ideas to make sense of the data of civic reality. The content of case studies often is taken from the pages of daily newspapers, weekly news magazines, or televised documentaries.

Trend 4: Development of Decision-Making Skills. Case studies of political and legal issues are used by teachers to develop decision-making skills of students. The issues raised by case studies are occasions for decisions by citizens. Learners are taught to identify occasions for decisions, to examine the alternative choices and the likely consequences of each choice, and to defend one choice as better than the others. This is an especially effective way to teach students how to apply their cognitive skills to the realities of civic life.

Trend 5: Comparative and International Analysis of Government and Citizenship. The global resurgence of constitutional democracy has aroused interest in the comparative method of teaching and learning about government and citizenship. Teachers are requiring students to compare institutions of constitutional democracy in their own country with institutions in other democracies of the contemporary world. The expectation is that this kind of comparative analysis will deepen students' understanding of their own democratic institutions while expanding their knowledge of democratic principles. Further, this kind of comparative analysis is likely to diminish ethnocentrism, as students learn the various ways that principles of democracy can be practiced (Hall 1993).

Trend 6: Development of Participatory Skills and Civic Virtues Through Cooperative Learning Activities. Teachers are emphasizing cooperative learning in small groups, which requires students to work together to achieve a common objective. Through this cooperative learning activity, students develop various participatory skills and the civic virtues associated with them. Learners involved regularly in cooperative learning situations tend to develop such skills as

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leadership, conflict resolution, compromise, negotiation, and constructive criticism (Slavin 1991). And they develop such virtues as toleration, civility, and trust (Stahl and VanSickle 1992).

Trend 7: The Use of Literature to Teach Civic Virtues. Civic educators have recognized that the study of literature, both fictional and historical, exposes students to interesting people who exemplify civic virtues in dramatic situations. The characters in these stories, therefore, may become role models for students. At the very least, they are positive examples of particular civic virtues that can help students understand the meaning and importance of morality in civic life. Sandra Stotsky, an expert on using literature to teach civic virtues, stresses the educational value of exposing learners "to characters who exhibit such traits as courage, hope, optimism, ambition, individual initiative, love of country, love of family, the ability to laugh at themselves, a concern for the environment, and outrage at social injustice" (1992, 1).

Trend 8: Active Learning of Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Virtues. Civic educators are involving students actively in their learning of knowledge, skills, and virtues. Examples of active learning include systematic concept learning, analysis of case studies, development of decision-making skills, cooperative learning tasks, and the interactive group discussions that are associated with teaching civic virtues through literary study. Intellectually active learning of knowledge, in contrast to passive reception of it, appears to be associated with higher levels of achievement. Furthermore, it enables students to develop skills and processes needed for independent inquiry and civic decision making throughout a lifetime. These are capacities of citizenship needed to make a constitutional democracy work.

Trend 9: The Conjoining of Content and Process in Teaching and Learning of Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Virtues. In their development of curricula and classroom lessons, teachers are recognizing that civic virtues and skills, intellectual and participatory, are inseparable from a body of civic knowledge or content. They assume that if learners would think critically and act effectively and virtuously in response to a public issue, they must understand the terms of the issue, its origins, the alternative responses to it, and the likely consequences of these responses. This understanding is based upon the knowledge of learners. And the application of this knowledge to explain, evaluate, and resolve a public issue depends upon the cognitive process skills of learners.

Basic content or subject matter and fundamental cognitive processes or operations are interrelated factors of teaching and learning. To elevate one over the other — content over process or vice versa — is a pedagogical flaw that interferes with effective civic education. Both academic content and process — civic knowledge, virtues, and skills — must be taught and learned in tandem to fulfill the mission of civic education, which is the development of individuals with the capacity to establish, maintain, and improve democratic governance and citizenship in their country and throughout the world.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the information provided or requested through Interlibrary Loan.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract RR93002014. Support was also provided through the Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for International Civic Education, an activity of CIVITAS: An International Civic Education Exchange Program, which is administered by the Center for Civic Education at Calabasas, CA, with support from the U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of CCE, OERI, or ED.